British cyclist Vernon Ethan, 22, ensured the perfect start for debutants Soudal – Quick-Step Devo Team, after winning the first stage of Tour du Rwanda 2023 thanks to his sprinting prowess.

The 115Km race with 19 teams was decided in a bunch sprint with Vernon coming on top.

The victory puts the young rider from Soudal Quick-Step Devo Team in control of General Classification of the eighth-day Tour du Rwanda—Africa's most grueling race.

The 115km stage from Kigali to Rwamagana in the Eastern province of Rwanda consisted of a hilly first part followed by five laps of an undulating circuit in the town of Rwamagana.

The race was largely controlled by two men in the breakaway Nsengimana Jean Bosco of Team Rwanda and James Fouche with the latter winning the Longest Breakaway prize. Nsengimana on the other hand took home the prizes for Best Combative Rider and Best climbing rider.

However, some analysts had pipped superstar Chris Froome to do his magic but Vernon and Soudal Quick-Step Devo Team was equally expected to pull off some magic moments owing to the Briton's recent performance in world tours.

Undoubtedly, Soudal Quick-Step Devo Team took control of the race in the last 20 kilometers, before Vernon unleashed a fierce sprint with 250 meters to go that saw him claim a fifth success in the pro ranks.

After the race, Vernon told his team's media team that: "It feels nice to win again so early in the season. It was nice to ride with the boys, they were all really strong and put on an impressive display, riding at the front from kilometer zero until the finish, all the time 100% committed. I am happy I could repay them with a victory and to have such a good start here."

He added: "It's great to be in Rwanda, the course was nice and the crowds were amazing, never seen something like this before! We're enjoying it so far and we hope to get some more strong results".

In addition to the GC lead, Vernon tops the best young rider classification.